

The Circuit Writer

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NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY
Northern New Jersey Conference, The United Methodist Church

ABOUT NORTHERN NEW JERSEY METHODISM - A FORGOTTEN CHAPLAIN OF THE CIVIL WAR

It was Saturday, March 8, 1862. The glare of midday disclosed a strange sight on the Elizabeth River. The Confederate "ironclad" the Merrimac was making a grand debut attended by her court the steamers Patrick Henry, Jamestown, Teases, Beaufort and Raleigh. This ugly lady of the sea would surely win no prize for beauty, but at that moment in sheer destructive power she had no equal. Buchanan, the flag officer, was taking her into an engagement that would change the character of modern naval warfare.

Awaiting the "ironclad" eastward from Fortress Monroe were the Union steam frigate the Minnesota, and the Roanoke, and the sailing frigate St. Lawrence together with several gunboats. On the westward near Newport News the sailing frigate Congress and the sailing sloop Cumberland rode at anchor. The old harpy Cumberland was the first to prove the squat, iron lady's destructiveness. Buchanan wanted to prove her armor against the Cumberland's formidable guns, especially her 70 pound rifle. As the afternoon began so did the Battle of Hampton Roads.

That this was a lopsided victory for the Confederate Merrimac is widely known. Her horrible effectiveness soon to be matched by the Monitor is clearly logged in every naval history of the Civil War. But more than timber and iron were rent that day in proving the Merrimac's effectiveness. Human lives were spent. One life spent that afternoon heroically and unforgettable, has been almost forgotten. Lt. Commander John L. Lenhart, Chaplain of the Cumberland, staying with his men to the last, elected to go down with his ship. Amid all the recitations and evaluations of the battle, Chaplain Lenhart's sacrifice remains little known.

Lenhart, a Methodist minister from New Jersey, was a seasoned naval veteran, having received his appointment February 27, 1847. Born in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania on October 29, 1805 and ordained in 1830 in Philadelphia as a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Lenhart spent 17 years in local pastorates. After ministering to congregations in Pennsylvania and Maryland, he moved to New Jersey and served in Long Branch, Mt. Holly, Bridgeton, Flemington, Camden, Newark, and Paterson. Lenhart was obviously a man of considerable energy and compassion. He was remembered in Flemington, New Jersey, in 1835 as one of "considerable popular talent" who achieved "great results along evangelistic lines". In 1838-39 while in Mt. Holly, he led the people in building and dedicating a new church. But his influence reached larger circles, for Uriah S. Stephens, the founder of the Knights of Labor, forerunner of the American labor movement, named Rev. John L. Lenhart as one of his teachers and sympathizers. While minister at Cross Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Paterson, his health broke. A serious infection threatened to end his ministry, and forced him, as he told a friend, "to be laid upon the shelf". But his appointment to the naval chaplaincy came just in time to save his sense of usefulness.

On this afternoon of March 8 as John Lenhart watched the Merrimac bear down on them he had just barely finished 15 years in naval service. These years had been full and worthwhile. Although his health was not the best, through shore and sea duty, he was able to continue a useful ministry. In between he found time to return to his family in Newark, New Jersey. Though seldom free from pain, he made the most of

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his days. And he couldn't deny that these years had been exciting, too! He would never forget the voyage of 1860 when he shipped out on the Constellation assigned to the African Squadron, the long voyage to that far off continent, and the capture of those seven slave ships off the west coast of Africa.

But none of the years could be compared to the moment. The broadsides just then exchanged between the Congress and the Merrimac foretold what the Cumberland and her crew faced. The light shot from the Congress rattled harmlessly off the Confederate ironclad. This would be a busy afternoon, and, perhaps, his ministry would never be more needed by his fellows than in these moments ahead.

Even as they watched the Cumberland's crew could see the Merrimac steaming across her bow to gain position for ramming. The old sloop was worse off than a sitting duck. Without power or armor she awaited the attack. Unable to bring her own broadside guns to target, her chief advantage in the moment was her courageous crew under Lt. G. W. Morris, acting commander.

The Cumberland's forward guns spoke first. Lenhart's ears rang from the deafening roar; his nostrils burned from the acrid smell of powder. The words he wrote to a friend only a few days before flashed to mind now with an odd, prophetic air, "It's just as near my heavenly home from the old Cumberland as from any other place." As the Merrimac's full fire thundered in reply, the Chaplain was sure that it was; if not nearer. It was for others too. That first heavy shot killed or wounded nine Union marines. The second shot disabled a gun and its entire crew. Only the powder boy survived. Huge wooden splinters flew about the forward deck like so many jagged arrows striking men down on every side. Lenhart, with a kind of courage born of his impulsive nature, moved about bringing comfort to the smoke-grimed wounded, and closing the eyes of the dead.

Fifteen minutes of fiery hell engulfed the Cumberland, when suddenly she shivered every timber. The Merrimac had smashed her ram into the Cumberland's bow. This blow became the Cumberland's first opportunity, for the Merrimac couldn't back off. The tidal current swung her stern almost broadside to the Cumberland. All of the Federal guns on that side were on target. Before the under-powered Merrimac could back free, Lenhart saw his shipmates pour three broadsides into the ironclad. But now they were again at the Merrimac's mercy. Buchanan's demand for surrender brought Lt. Morris' historic reply: "Never! We will sink with our colors flying."

The iron-clad raked the Cumberland again with heavy fire. Water was pouring through the hole in her bow. Efforts to bring her about were futile. She was already sinking. As the sloop settled forward the casualties mounted. Below deck the surgeons and the Chaplain did all they could to aid the wounded.

Buchanan rammed the beaten Cumberland once more and then steamed past her up the James River. She was sinking rapidly. Lt. Morris ordered all officers in charge of wounded to bring on deck those who might be saved. Some of the wounded were lashed to racks and mess chests and set adrift. The last one on deck was the gunner. He shouted for Lenhart to follow. But the Chaplain in that last moment chose to remain with the men who would never leave the ship. In a matter of minutes the old Cumberland went down in shallow water taking with her 121 men. The water covered all but the masts. In silent tribute to those within her the American flag could still be seen on the gaff, whipping in the afternoon breeze.

Not long before the engagement, Chaplain Lenhart had refused an appointment as chaplain of a New York hospital saying, in reference to his ship: "I wish to see the end of her eventful cruise." He saw it!

The prowess of the Merrimac was now unquestioned. The bravery of all who fought that day was beyond doubt. But the Chaplain, Lt. Commander John L. Lenhart, set an example of inspired devotion and courageous faithfulness that would light the way for many who would follow. His simple declaration, written not long before his death, may well stand as the hallmark of all armed forces chaplains regardless of creed. "My great desire," wrote Lenhart, "is to be a useful minister so that whether on shore, or afloat, in peace or in war, I may do good to my fellow men."

Robert Drew Simpson

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE

HACKENSACK: The United Methodist Church of Hackensack is celebrating its 125th anniversary under the leadership of Mrs. Joyce Kennefick. The Rev. B. O'Rear reported on the tentative plans for a year-long schedule of events: March, historical display showing the events of the life of the UMC; April, Memorial Sunday; May, Homecoming dinner; June, Women of the Church; September, Musical; October 13, Visit of Bishop Taylor and service of re-dedication. Dennis Collins is historian.

NEWARK: On April 28, 1974 Trinity United Methodist Church (formerly First Methodist Protestant Church) celebrated its 115th anniversary. The speaker for this occasion was retired Bishop Fred C. Holloway. Bishop Holloway grew up as a member of Trinity Church and was ordained Deacon in Trinity Church in April, 1921.

OTHERS? THIS IS A REGULAR COLUMN in our Newsletter. If your church is planning an anniversary celebration or preparing a history, please contact the editor!

CHURCH HISTORY CONTEST - Awards to be presented during 1974 Conference

Seven local churches (Flemington, Hackettstown, Montclair, Newfoundland, Rahway, Rockaway and South Orange-Vailsburg) submitted histories of their churches published during the calendar year 1973 for our first annual Church History Recognition Contest. Two awards will be presented during the 1974 Conference meeting in June.

If your church has already published or plans to publish a history of your local church in 1974, we urge you to enter it in the annual contest sponsored by the Conference Commission on Archives and History. Large or small, pamphlet or hard-bound volume, mimeographed or printed, all histories produced during 1974 are eligible. Several have already been received. Each history will become part of the Conference's permanent collection.

MAIL ONE COPY TO: Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, New Jersey 07940 by February 1, 1975. Awards will be announced during the 1975 session of Conference.

ARCHIVAL POLICY RECOMMENDED TO THE CONFERENCE

In compliance with the BOOK OF DISCIPLINE, 1972, and in order to preserve those records which have continuing historical value, the Conference Commission on Archives and History has prepared a draft of a formal "Archival Policy" for the Northern New Jersey Conference. The text is printed in the 1974 pre-Conference booklet. Copies are also available from the editor. We hope for a full discussion and favorable action at the June 1974 meeting of the Conference.

ANNUAL DINNER MEETING HELD AT DREW MAY 14

More than thirty persons gathered for dinner in the University Commons at Drew University on Tuesday, May 14. Highlight of the evening was a presentation of a fine new color film, "Francis Asbury", produced by Asbury College, Wilmore, Kentucky.

ACCESSIONS TO CONFERENCE DEPOSITORY AT DREW UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Manuscript Records: Newark and Eastern District Church Societies, records of former Newark Conference; First German M. E. Church, Paterson, records, 1882-1949; Christ Methodist Church, Paterson, records, 1949-1968.

Periodicals: CIRCUIT WRITER, v 1, 1973; SECOND WIND, irregular newsletter of Retired Ministers' Asso. of Northern New Jersey Conference, 1973.

Conference Mailing List: We now receive all conference mailings.

Local Church Histories: Little Falls, 1943; Parsippany, 1901; and Milford, Pa., 1926 from William Twiddy; Allendale, 1966 by Mrs. Eugene Webb. (Plus all local church histories submitted for the contest--see the article elsewhere)

A limited number of copies of an inventory of the manuscript holdings of the Conference Archives prepared in 1973 are available. Contact the editor.

AMERICAN REVOLUTION BICENTENNIAL -- Resources for Planning

Methodism and America grew up together. One historian has labelled the Methodists as the most American of the churches. Although we will not celebrate our 200th birthday as an organized church until 1984, our church took shape during the years of the American Revolution. Francis Asbury made some of his first tours of New Jersey during those years, preaching in Kingwood in 1776.

How are we in the churches planning to celebrate our common history? Remember, July 4, 1976 is a Sunday.

SOME USEFUL PUBLICATIONS

American Association for State and Local History. AMERICAN BICENTENNIAL:

PATHWAYS TO CELEBRATION, by Robert G. Hartje, 1973. (Cloth \$7.95; paper \$5.00, members \$3.50; 1315 8th Ave., S, Nashville, Tenn. 37203)

Armstrong, James, UNITED METHODIST PRIMER, Nashville, Tidings, 1972. 79p. (\$1.00 from Tidings, 1908 Grand Ave., Nashville, Tenn. 37203)

Boorstin, Daniel, THE AMERICANS. New York, Random House, 1958-73. 3 vol. (available in paperback, see your local bookstore)

Emurian, Ernest, "The Pledge of Allegiance, Bi-centennial edition, 1776-1976," sheet music. (order from the Rev. Ernest Emurian, 3701 Lorcom Lane, Arlington, Va., 22207)

Ferguson, Charles W. **ORGANIZING TO BEAT THE DEVIL: METHODISTS AND THE MAKING OF AMERICA.** Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, 1971. (Out of print, but try your local public library.)

Harmon, Francis S., **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN AMERICA.** New York, Friendship Press, 1972. (\$1.75 paperback from Friendship Press, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10027, or from your local bookstore)

Maser, Frederick, **THE DRAMATIC STORY OF EARLY AMERICAN METHODISM.** Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1965, 109p. (25¢ each from Commission on Archives and History, P. O. Box 488, Lake Junaluska, N.C. 28745)

Miller, John C., **ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.** Stanford, Calif., Stanford U. Press, 1959. (paperback, check your local bookstore)

National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution. **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BICENTENNIAL FOCUS--1976.** 1972 (58p. paperback, Administration Building, 1776 D St., N. W., Washington, D. C. 20006)

National Trust for Historical Preservation. **DIRECTORY FOR BICENTENNIAL PLANNING.** 1972. (31p. paperback \$1.50)

"United Methodist Historic Shrines", a ten-page folder (free from Commission on Archives and History, P. O. Box #488, Lake Junaluska, N.C. 28745)

U. S. American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. **FILMS RELATING TO THE 200th ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED STATES.** 8p. pamphlet. Free. 736 Jackson Place, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20276.

U. S. Library of Congress. **THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: A SELECTED READING LIST.** 1968. 37p. pamphlet. 50¢.

CREATING INDEPENDENCE, 1763-1789, BACKGROUND READING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. 1972. 62p. paperback. 75¢.

PERIODICAL LITERATURE ON THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND CHANGING INTERPRETATIONS, 1895-1970; A SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY. Compiled by Ronald M. Gephart, 1971. (93p. paperback, \$1.00 Washington, D. C. 20540).

U. S. National Archives. **PICTURES OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR.** 8p. pamphlet. Free. (Washington, D. C. 20408)

PERIODICALS

BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN. Weekly. Free. American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 736 Jackson Pl., N. W., Washington, D.C. 20276

COLONIAL HERITAGE, INCLUDING THE BICENTENNIAL CHRONICLE. 8 months each year. \$5.00, P. O. Box #1776, Bound Brook, N. J. 08805

METHODIST HISTORY. Quarterly. \$5.00 a year, \$8.00 for two years. Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Church, P. O. Box #488, Lake Junaluska, N. C. 28745

NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL COMMISSION NEWSLETTER. Monthly. Free. N. J. Historical Commission, State Library, 185 W. State St., Trenton, N. J. 08625

USA 200, THE AMERICAN BICENTENNIAL NEWSLETTER. Monthly (11 issues) \$25.00 Bicentennial Services Corporation, P. O. Box #200, Glen Ridge, N. J. 07028 or try your local public library.

NEW RESOURCES IN PROGRESS FOR UNITED METHODISTS

Curricula: An adult study course will be offered in 1975 dealing with aspects of the Bicentennial such as citizenship and revolution.

General Church Periodicals: A number of articles will be carried in UNITED METHODISTS TODAY, INTERPRETER, ENGAGE, etc.

Abingdon Press: Several books will be released on topics related to the Bicentennial.

Cokesbury Bookstores: Both mail order and retail stores will distribute materials related to the bicentennial celebration in the churches.

United Methodist Communications: A new color motion picture on the History of the United Methodist Church will be released in mid-1974. It is designed to be used in confirmation classes, church school classes, and family night programs. 22 minutes, 16mm. When released it may be obtained from the Conference Office in Madison or through Cokesbury Bookstore.

HELP IS AVAILABLE!

Contact:

Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Church, P. O. Box #488, Lake Junaluska, N. C. 28745

Commission on Archives and History, Northern New Jersey Conference. The Rev. Paul E. Spiecker, 452 Lafayette Ave., Hawthorne, N. J. 07506. (Phone: 201-427-0725) or Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University, Library, Madison, N. J. 07940 (Phone: 201-377-3000, ext. 243)

New Jersey American Revolution Bicentennial Committee.

Walter T. Peters, Jr., Executive Director, 349 W. State St., Trenton, N. J. 08618. (Phone: 609-292-6576)

American Association for State and Local History. Memberships, \$12.50 individual, \$25.00 institutional. Includes monthly magazine. 1315 Eighth Ave., So, Nashville, Tenn. 37203